DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 777 HE 029 610

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | Study Abroad: You Can Get There from Here. A Guide for Women and Men. |
| INSTITUTION | Institute of International Education, New York, N.Y. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y. |
| PUB DATE | 96 |
| NOTE | 41p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | IEE Books, P.O. Box 371, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0371 (no charge). |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC02 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Access to Information; Acculturation; Admission Criteria; *College Admission; College Applicants; Culture Conflict; Eligibility; *Fellowships; Foreign Countries; Health Insurance; Help Seeking; Higher Education; Information Sources; *International Educational Exchange; Interpersonal Competence; Interviews; Letters (Correspondence); Money Management; Parent Financial Contribution; *Scholarships; Standardized Tests; *Study Abroad; *Womens Education |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Letters of Recommendation |

ABSTRACT

This brochure draws on a study of women's participation in international scholarship programs to provide practical information on a variety of issues in study abroad. While much of the information is intended to address barriers faced by women, it is generally also applicable to men. Topics addressed include: accessibility of program information, which is sometimes considered privileged or may be difficult to find; varied sources of information, particularly organizational; common objections raised to women's participation in international study, and sources of support; the testing and application process (preparing for and taking standardized tests, making application to foreign universities, obtaining effective letters of recommendation, common pitfalls, and making contacts and pursuing connections); issues in the interview and selection process (preparation for the interview, appearance and demeanor, the interview experience, and questions for which the applicant should be prepared); terms and conditions of the scholarship (financial and family issues, health insurance); and culture shock and tips for enhancing acculturation. Emphasis is placed on developing persistence and confidence. (MSE)

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# STUDY ABROAD
## you *can* get there from here

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## A GUIDE FOR WOMEN*

*and men

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# STUDY ABROAD

## you *can* get there from here

**A GUIDE FOR WOMEN***

*and men

# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION:

**"...so spirited, so excited, full of letters falling on doormats and whoops of joy from young people... packing their cases, looking at strange currency, getting ready to open their minds and adapt their views and fill their memories with sights and sounds which would change their future lives."**

*President of Ireland Mary Robinson describing international education at the 75th anniversary celebration of the Institute of International Education in 1994*

# Women Speak Up

"This is education for liberation. We have to get out of the system in order to express and explore new ideas. Here [in the U.S.] we do not ask to be allowed to participate – we are expected to. I have also learned that in spite of oppression, one can work hard and benefit from every opportunity. The Program gave me the knowledge and skills I need to make changes. I will return with greater self-confidence and a renewed commitment to serve my community."
*1995 South African Career Development Fellowship Program alumna*

"My Humphrey year has been conducive to shattering myths about the American nation, but most important, my stay in the States has reinforced my love for my own country and confidence that we have the capability of addressing our own problems. Can one end the program with a realization better than this?
*1994 Humphrey Fellowship Program alumna from Pakistan*

"My goal is to make a major contribution in life – to change the health system and cultural constraints that oppress women from the top as well as from the grassroots level. In order to be heard in Asia, I need to have an award [for study abroad] that is both recognized and accepted by my male counterparts."
*1995 AAUW Educational Foundation International Fellow from Malaysia*

"Coming to the United States has changed my life by opening up a world of opportunities to me. I firmly believe in cooperation between nations and it was a joy to realize that I was part of an exchange where I learned from others and others learned from me. El Salvador needs me now and certainly the education I received in this country helped me get the job I have back home."
*1995 Encyclopaedia Britannica Scholarship Program alumna from El Salvador*

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# Introduction

Despite recent progress, the percentage of women participants in international scholarship programs remains markedly lower than that of men. To address this problem, the Institute of International Education, with support from the Ford Foundation, surveyed a number of these programs to identify why some were more successful than others in attracting and retaining women candidates. At the end of the study, IIE sponsored a conference at which program administrators, funding agencies, and program alumnae came together to develop a set of recommendations to promote women's increased participation in international scholarship programs.

This handbook, one product of the Ford-supported project, offers women around the world practical information on the variety of issues involved in study abroad.* Much of the material in this handbook is based on in-depth interviews with a group of program alumnae who met with IIE staff to discuss their personal experiences studying abroad. Hailing from countries as widely separated both geographically and culturally as Argentina and the Sudan, Hungary and Indonesia, Costa Rica and South Africa, each participant brought her own perspective and unique anecdotal reflections to the conversation. Despite the group's inherent diversity, it became clear that these women also had much in common — as international students, as engaged and committed professionals, and, not least, as women pursuing their dreams in what is still largely a man's world.

We are immensely grateful to the many women who participated in this research project: those interviewed and surveyed, the conferees, advisory committee members, report authors, and those at the Ford Foundation who supported the effort.

*This booklet is not just for women. Clearly, men face some of the same bureaucratic hurdles as women. Nonetheless, the barriers to women's participation are often extremely subtle, culturally imbedded in long-held societal assumptions that can be difficult to recognize, and, once identified, even more problematic to overcome. Therefore, the concerns of women serve to frame the many issues that are addressed in this booklet.

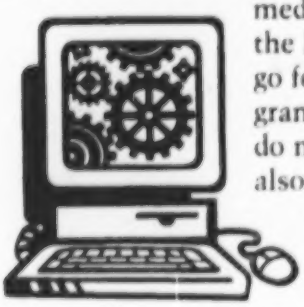
## Access To Information

The first step in pursuing educational or training opportunities abroad is knowing what kinds of programs are available. Despite the highly-touted "information revolution," the availability and quality of information concerning international scholarship and training programs varies greatly around the world. For some people, learning about the existence of international programs is more a matter of chance than design. Several alumnae said that they knew such a possibility existed only because someone in their family had studied abroad. At some universities, program brochures are treated as privileged information by a few faculty who may decide to share them only with favored students. On the other hand, the situation is not uniformly bleak. One woman reported that staff from USIS (United States Information Service) visited her office and solicited her participation in a special program aimed at mid-career public administration professionals. Others have learned of opportunities on the radio, or in newspapers, or by word-of-mouth from colleagues.

Regardless of the situation in your country, the general availability of information, and the helpful or hindering attitude of those who hold the information, the key elements to success worldwide are PERSISTENCE and DETERMINATION and CONFIDENCE.

Keep in mind that no matter who or what you consult, the process of securing detailed, focused information takes effort. It is up to you to thoroughly consider all the benefits — and potential problems — associated with international education, and to be as specific as possible when you start your investigations. Try to pinpoint what and where and why you want to study abroad. Many programs are very specific in their requirements. Clearly defining your objectives will help you to find the right program to match your academic and/or professional goals.

Think creatively about where you might find information. Some programs distribute posters not only at universities, but also through the news media. If you have access to it, the Internet is a good place to go for information. Many programs have "home pages," as do many universities, which also may have information on their own scholarship programs, especially on the graduate level. If you do not have access to a computer, perhaps you know someone who does at home or at work.



Talk to people and explore every reasonable lead. Some people to whom you go for advice may be intentionally unhelpful, treating this kind of information as a state secret, or doling it out as if they are doing you an enormous favor. Others may genuinely not know the answer to your questions, and still others may send you, wittingly or not, in the wrong direction.

It is important to remember that all those from whom you seek advice will have their own experience and concerns, and they may not necessarily be the same as yours. For example, a number of programs have age limits and if you are too young or too old to fit into a particular program's guidelines, you may get rebuffed at the first try. Or you may be questioned about your economic or family situation. Do not be discouraged! There are programs that do not have rigid age requirements, and there are many avenues to explore for financial assistance.

Attitude is very important. How you present yourself can make a big difference. If you project confidence people will often treat you more seriously. But if you are tentative or appear hesitant, it will be much easier for people to dismiss you and your request.

If you are absolutely committed to the idea of studying abroad, and have the academic standing, language skills, and financial resources required, your chances of achieving your goals are good — not guaranteed, but good. If, however, you allow a

few early setbacks to become insurmountable obstacles, it is absolutely assured that nothing will happen. And while you may not find the program that meets all of your goals and dreams, studying in a country other than your own can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of your life. So start the process. Ask questions. You may be surprised by what you discover.

What follows is a list of resources that may assist you in your search. Note that many of these sites tend to be located in large capital cities. If you live in a remote or rural area, you may have to travel to the largest nearby city to conduct your research. Before you go, you should write a letter, or telephone the appropriate office and make sure of their hours of operation, and that a personal visit will be worthwhile.

# Where to Find Information on Study Abroad

### *Family/Friends, Social/Business Contacts and Connections*

Anyone you know who has already studied abroad — or anyone you know who knows someone — can be a tremendous source of information, although it will necessarily be anecdotal. Keep in mind that everyone has a different experience, and your journey may not mirror theirs. But how they got started on the journey may be useful guidance for your own first steps.

### *Home Country Universities*

If you are enrolled in a university, talk to your professors, the chair or dean of your department or faculty. Often there are reciprocal exchange agreements between your university and those in other countries that are not known to more than a handful of people within the department. Remember that deans and professors are often sent information that they may be too busy to read, so ask their assistants as well. Consult students and/or faculty in the Women's Study department if your university has one. Check the student newspapers and bulletin boards for notices or advertisements. Consult staff at the Student Advisement Office, if one exists.

### *Foreign Universities*

If you already know which foreign university you would like to attend, contact it directly. Write to the Admissions Office at the university, requesting information — an application form and any necessary financial aid materials — for international students. Many, but not all large universities have an Office for International Students from which you can also request information. Keep in mind that you need not have your full funding in place before you contact a university. These institutions often can provide some funding to very well-qualified individuals, especially at the graduate level. They also will have information on other sources you may consider for financial assistance.

### *University Fairs*

Many foreign governments periodically sponsor university fairs at which colleges and universities from around the world distribute information to potential students. These fairs are a very good opportunity to make personal contacts and get the most up-to-date information. Even if you don't know whether you are able to afford to study abroad, attending such a fair can get you the basic information you'll need to start exploring your options. Such fairs are advertised in local media and usually do not charge admission to the students seeking information.

### *Private Foundations/Consultants*

Information is a valuable commodity, and research can be a time-consuming, sometimes frustrating process. Some countries have private foundations and for-profit organizations that specialize in providing information about study abroad. Some offer consultants who will help applicants through the process. The price of these services varies from relatively reasonable to outrageously expensive. If you decide to utilize one of these services, it is advisable to find out as much as possible about a given organization's reputation — in advance — to ensure that you will get the most value for your money.

### *United States Information Service (USIS Posts)*

For information on study opportunities in the United States, the U.S. Information Service is the place to start. Its staff serve in the U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and are sometimes based at binational centers. Although the breadth of information varies from country to country, USIS staff tend to be good sources of current information about a variety of international education programs, notably the Fulbright Fellowship Program, which funds U.S. study opportunities for graduate (postgraduate) students and faculty.

### *Foreign Embassies/Exchange Agencies*

Embassies sometimes have special sections with information on international educational opportunities in their countries. Usually the Educational Attache or Cultural Affairs Officer is the person heading this section. Typically they will have brochures and other promotional materials available. Be aware, however, that sometimes this material is out-of-date or irrelevant to your specific needs. Don't be shy. Ask embassy staff who you might contact, by writing or in person, to acquire the latest information, or to explore other program options.

Organizations like the British Council and the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Agency) are good sources for information on study in their countries. They have overseas branches in many countries, as do the French, Scandinavian, and many other governments that offer scholarships to foreign students.

### *Fulbright Commissions*

In some countries there are Fulbright Commissions that are bilateral agencies which handle the local recruitment and nomination process. Program staff there are very knowledgeable about the Fulbright Program and also often serve as a clearinghouse of information about other programs as well.

Educational advising offices at Fulbright Commissions or USIS offices in your home country are the best place to start when seeking funds for U.S. study. You may also want to consult a copy of IIE's publication *Funding for U.S. Study: A Guide for Foreign Nationals*, which is available at these offices and International Centers for Research on Women (see inside back cover).

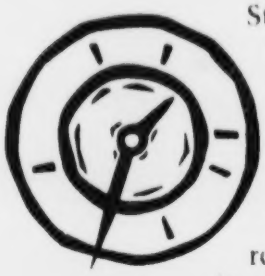
### *Libraries/NGOs*

The quality and comprehensiveness of library collections vary greatly. In addition to municipal and university collections, look into private collections that are housed at non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

### *Ministries of Education and Other Government Agencies*

Some government agencies in your own country may administer international programs, but they are often available only to government employees. Even if you are not employed by your country's government, it might be worth checking to see if any opportunities are open to you. Ministries of Education also often have information on a variety of study abroad programs. When seeking information from official agencies, it is helpful to keep in mind that such institutions are inherently political. Some government employees may therefore be fair and forthcoming, others may not. Regardless of the reception you receive, it is important not to let the bureaucracy grind you down. If you do not get satisfaction the first time you ask, you must simply ask again, and again — perhaps on another day, perhaps from another person, perhaps phrasing the question differently. Persistence may, in the end, elicit some useful result.

### *A Word About Timing*



Start early! Everything always takes much longer than you expect. There are many details involved in applying to international programs, all of which require time. Transcripts of your academic record, for example, must be obtained, as well as letters of recommendation (see page 14) and other materials. It may also be necessary to arrange for documents to be translated. Some programs require that you take standardized tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which are given only periodically (see page 13). It is critical to make note of all deadlines and plan accordingly.

It is also important to recognize that your desire to pursue study or training abroad will have an impact on many people in your life — your parents, your spouse, your children, other family and friends, your employer, your professors. When and how you involve these various people in your planning process will depend on your individual situation. For example, some programs may require you to seek a leave of absence if you are working — and that takes time to arrange. Others may require that you be currently enrolled at a university. Some programs offer additional support to bring family members with you, while others (the majority) do not.

Regardless of your particular situation, it is always advisable to expect the unexpected. Packing up your life and moving to another country for an extended period of time is complicated as well as exciting, and the more time you give yourself to plan and prepare the smoother the experience will be.

### *Overcoming Barriers*

The problems and barriers that women face in pursuing international education are wide-ranging. A 22-year-old Chilean graduate student might have to overcome her family's preference for educating only her brothers, or her parents' fears for their only daughter living thousands of miles from home. A 31-year-old Egyptian mother of two seeking a doctorate may encounter resistance at her perceived "selfishness" at "up-rooting and disrupting" her family. And a 43-year-old economist from Kazakhstan who is chosen for advanced training may be thought to be jeopardizing her marriage by leaving behind her husband while she goes abroad. You may well have to deal with similar concerns when you announce your own intention to study abroad — as many women have before you.

Family and personal concerns often weigh heavily in women's professional decisions. Societal norms and expectations — and restrictions and taboos — vary from country to country, from city to rural

areas, and even from family to family within the same community. While there are strategies for helping to overcome barriers, such tremendous diversity demands that every woman who decides to pursue international educational opportunities necessarily address these issues within her own specific cultural and familial context (see below).

Regardless of the specific strategy, the goal is the same: to defuse resistance, and, if possible, to enlist the support of family, colleagues, and friends in a process that requires enormous time, energy and commitment.

In some countries, achieving a college-level education in her home country is already testament to a woman's determination — and her ability to overcome both overt and covert discrimination. Within this context pursuing a scholarship to study abroad might be seen as the logical next step. It is, however, a very significant next step, one that few women (or men) undertake lightly.

In addition to the many issues that women confront as women, it is also crucial to realize that international scholarship programs are enormously competitive for everyone. A high level of academic achievement, as well as adequate language skills for the appropriate country, are absolutely required.

It is also important to know that all programs vary in their focus — they have different priorities, different qualities and interests that they are looking for in potential grantees. Be sure to study the program requirements before you apply and choose those that most closely match your skills and goals. In other words, look for program that is a "good fit" for you.

### *Some Common Objections*

While some people may try to dissuade you with a variety of arguments, these arguments tend to be couched in negative terms. Some people may think you are selfish or irresponsible toward your parents, your husband, your children. Others may criticize you for possibly jeopardizing your husband's career (by having him travel with you abroad), or conversely, consider it a sin if you leave your husband for a period of time.

To help you overcome some of these objections, it is important to stress the positive aspects of the experience. Pursuing advanced education overseas will benefit not only you, but also your family, and, broadly speaking, perhaps even your country. Upon your return you will be better prepared to serve in your chosen profession, and you may have a significant impact on your community in your chosen field. International scholarships are also very prestigious. It is an honor to be chosen, and it reflects well not only on you, as a role model to others, but on your entire family and your community. More generally, the benefits of international education are difficult to quantify because every person's experience is different. There are common threads including gaining both academic and practical knowledge, broadening your personal and professional experience, making new friends, and establishing new professional contacts.

A few international scholarship programs are particularly sensitive to the special problems women face, sometimes providing helpful orientation materials or even sending a program officer to meet with prospective grantees and their families to facilitate the process. It is, however, much more common that you will not have this level of support from the program before you leave your home country. That is why it is so important to involve those who matter to you in the process as early as possible and try to enlist their support. If you know that you will encounter resistance from a particular person — a parent, a spouse, an employer — think about who you can recruit to help you

counter that opposition: perhaps a sibling, professional colleague, or trusted family friend. The more people who are supportive of you, the easier the process will be.

Remember that thousands of international women receive financial assistance to study abroad each year in the United States, and thousands of others receive support and overseas training from universities in Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and other leading host countries of foreign students. You are not alone in your desire for overseas training and you will not be alone once you go abroad to study. Those who have done so and returned home to your country can be important allies for you in your preparation efforts.

# The Testing and Application Process

### *Standardized Tests*

Standardized tests are required by many programs. For example, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a standard English-language examination which most U.S. universities require of international applicants seeking admission. Typically tests such as TOEFL, Graduate Record Exam (GRE), and Graduate Management Aptitude Test (GMAT) are offered on a regular schedule, no more than once every few months and less frequently in some countries. Find out when and where they will be offered, either from the local registration site or by writing directly to the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey (see address below).

Testing situations are inherently stressful. To make the experience easier, and to build up your confidence, give yourself plenty of time to prepare for the test. Make sure that your language skills are adequate. Also keep in mind:

- There are "cram" schools in many countries, although price and quality vary.
- Practice books are much cheaper and are often equally useful tools; they include sample exams to help you prepare.
- Do not assume that multiple choice tests are easy — they are not. Be sure to practice on sample exams if you are not familiar with such tests.
- You may take these tests more than once if you are not satisfied with your scores, but tests are costly — utilize practice books first.
- Language tapes are available for sale or rent to prepare for oral comprehension tests.
- Most U.S. standardized tests have a free information bulletin you are entitled to receive, either from USIS educational advising offices or other organizations responsible for administering the test in your country. Bulletins contain sample questions and good

advice about preparing for the examination. If the information bulletin is not available for U.S. TOEFL, GRE, GMAT, or SAT exams, write for a free copy to:

**The Educational Testing Service**
**Princeton NJ 08541 USA**

### *Applications to Foreign Universities*

The application process varies from program to program. It is your responsibility to make sure that your application is complete, including test scores, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and all narrative and financial information. Deadlines are critical and usually non-negotiable. Many universities and scholarship programs simply will not accept applications that arrive after the stated deadline. So try very hard to meet the deadline, or even submit early to compensate for the slow postal system and to give the university time to correspond with you if there is a problem with your application. If there is no possibility of getting your application in on time, send it in late with a written explanation of why. It is possible, though not likely, that the university may be flexible.

### *Letters of Recommendation*

Letters of recommendation are a crucial component of the application. A number of factors may influence your choice of who to ask. Among the traits you should look for in potential writers of your letters of reference are:

- those who know you well personally, professionally, and/or academically
- those that know your work, your publications, or research if applicable
- those who have a fairly good command of the host-country's language
- those who hold key positions in your field and know you
- those who have personally participated in international education programs, and thus are familiar with the expected content of such letters

To ensure that your references will promote you strongly by providing the most effective and informed recommendation letter possible, you should meet with the letter writers in advance if possible to give them the following information:

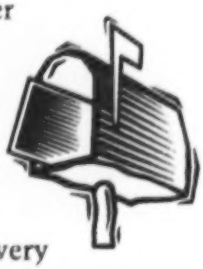
- Tell them why you want this scholarship, how it will meet your professional goals.
- Tell them your qualifications and achievements and give them a written summary.
- Give them a copy of the program description, and indicate how it meets your needs.
- Give them an updated copy of your resume, for use in writing the letter.
- Make it as easy as possible by giving them any required forms and complete information on where and to whom to send the letter. Remember that some letters must be mailed directly to the scholarship office while others must be put in a sealed envelope and returned with your application form. Check the instructions and tell your letter writer exactly what to do.
- Give them plenty of time to write and send the letter before the deadline.
- A week before the deadline, check with them to see if the letter went out. Check again after the deadline and thank them for sending it (or remind them to do so if it hasn't gone yet).

### *Tips for Better Letters*

If your reference was once your employer or professor, but no longer holds that position, their current title may appear less relevant to your application. To avoid this possible confusion, make sure that their letter, in the first paragraph, clearly indicates their former relationship to you and their relevance as a reference.

In addition, be sure to write your own letter to the scholarship program indicating everyone from whom you've requested references. Include their names, addresses, telephone, and fax numbers if available. It may also be helpful if you indicate

your reference's relationship to you (teacher, former employers, etc.), especially if it is not obvious from their title and current position. This way, if one of your reference letters does not arrive in time, program staff can follow up if they choose.



If a program requires a support letter from a specific person (e.g., your immediate supervisor, your department chair, or a particular government official) do your best to follow the program guidelines and obtain this letter. However, sometimes these situations can be very sensitive politically or personally, and you may find that the very people you need may not be willing to help. Again, persistence is the key. If you cannot convince them to help you, develop an alternative strategy. Perhaps you can approach another person of equal rank or stature. Contact the scholarship program staff and tell them your problem. If you are a strong candidate in all other ways, it is possible that they can be flexible about this requirement.

### *Common Pitfalls*

Do not choose someone as a reference who does not know you simply because s/he is an important person in your country. The program is seeking information about YOU and it may hurt your application if your reference is not actually familiar with you or your work, but has only an impressive title.

Make sure your reference is specific about your academic and/or professional qualifications and achievements. Comments such as "she's very sweet," will distract from your more substantive qualities and thus may weaken your application.

Sometimes your reference may request your assistance in crafting the letter, particularly if their foreign language skills are rudimentary. If you are asked to provide a draft text for letters from more than one reference, try to make sure that the final letters are not identical in wording. The program staff will immediately assume that you, and not the reference, actually wrote the letter and your application will be less successful.

### *A Word About Contacts*

There is no doubt that contacts and connections can be very helpful. In some countries, however, they are more important than in others. If it is clear that using personal connections will enhance your situation, you should certainly take steps to ensure that those individuals know of your plans and will agree to help you should you need their assistance.

Although you may think you don't know anyone of potential influence, you may surprise yourself. Make a list of everyone — family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances — you think might possibly be helpful. Ask their opinions. Don't be shy. If there are particular people you think would be helpful, but you do not know them, try to put yourself in situations where you can meet them. Be persistent. They may be flattered by your inquiries.

But even if you are not successful or lack any contacts, do not despair. While contacts may smooth the way, they are not necessarily required. Most international scholarship programs make awards strictly on merit, and do not expect applicants to use connections. At U.S. universities and those in many other countries, personal contacts are rarely a crucial factor in the admissions process. And, indeed, although connections may help you gain acceptance, your own skills and talents will ultimately define your success.

Remember: It is not who you **KNOW**, but who **YOU** are.

# Selection/Interviewing Issues

Not every scholarship program requires an interview. Those that do can present a special challenge for which you may wish to prepare. The format and length of the personal interview vary widely from program to program. Some selection panels are very large, with as many as 20 people, others may have only one or two. Some panels include laypeople and/or program alumni as well as experts in your field. Panels can include people of any nationality, in any combination. They may be all male, all female, or mixed. Some programs provide guidelines and fair, reasonable sample questions for their selectors, but there is no guarantee that all selectors will utilize the guidelines. Most selectors strive to be as professional as possible, but they cannot help but bring their own expectations and biases to the process. Even the most professional selection body is, on some level, subjective.

### *Preparation*

An interview is an inherently dynamic situation, dependent on the interplay of personalities in the room. For this reason, "practice interviews" or "rehearsals" with friends or relatives may not be helpful since they may have no bearing at all on the real thing. But if you are very nervous or shy about being interviewed it might be useful to try out your presentation on a fellow student or faculty member in your field. But no matter how much preparation you do, you should realize that anything can happen and be prepared to expect the unexpected. Remember, the interview is the first (and only) personal impression program selectors will have of you — and your best (and perhaps only) opportunity to present yourself. You have already gotten this far, which is no small achievement. Your best strategy now is to BE CONFIDENT, BE PROFESSIONAL, and BE YOURSELF.

An interview can be a stressful situation, one in which you must think on your feet, often in a language that is not your native tongue. There are, however, a number of ways to make the interview

less daunting. Information is power. The more you know and can articulate your own goals and objectives, the more you know about the program, and, if possible, the selectors on the panel, the more relaxed and comfortable you will be.

- Research the background of the program and its donor organization — their priorities may be a clue to the kinds of questions you may be asked.
- If the program trains people in very specific areas, such as government, be sure to educate yourself on current events — local, national and international.
- Research the composition of the selection panel. Will it be academics, business people, civil servants? If possible, find out their interests and past behavior in screening other applicants.
- Think about your reasons for wanting this scholarship; practice saying them out loud in a concise and interesting way.
- Try to anticipate questions — and your answers — in advance.
- Write everything down — it will be easier to recall during the interview if you have an image of a written script in your head — but don't read from notes in the interview itself.
- Develop a list of your own questions for the selectors, about the scholarship program or about the field in which they are experts.

### *Appearance and Demeanor*

Given the subjective nature of the interview, it is important to realize that how you present yourself matters. And it may matter to some selectors more than others — you simply cannot know. In general you want to avoid any clothing or behavior that takes away from the substantive issues of the interview.

Think about what you will wear. People will form instant impressions of you from your clothing and how you carry yourself, before your have uttered a single word. Dress naturally, but appropriately to

the situation. If you are too casual (jeans) or too formal (an elaborate gown) it may signal a lack of respect — or worse, ignorance — of the process, and of the scholarship.

Wear simple, neat, non-ostentatious clothing. When in doubt opt for the conservative: skirts rather than trousers; longer rather than shorter skirt-length; muted colors; medium-height heels. Be aware that some more tradition-bound panelists may be offended if you appear in Western-style dress — even if you hope to study in a Western country.

If you feel comfortable, look professional, and are well-prepared, you cannot help but project a positive attitude during the interview. And this confidence will do much to help you through any unexpected situation.

### *The Interview*

There is no set formula for a successful interview. You may have to face a long conference table filled with more than a dozen male professors, or a panel of high-powered male and female business executives — or you may have a relatively casual conversation with a local or foreign civil servant and a program alumna. One program even has a three-day interview, so that selectors can evaluate candidates in a variety of professional and social settings. Try to find out in advance, if you possibly can, by asking program staff or former applicants or grantees.

You may have to wait a very long time for the interview to start — delays of up to 6 or 7 hours are not unheard of. Bring reading materials that will divert you if this happens. Obsessing too much on the interview while you are waiting may be counterproductive.

Have faith in yourself. It may hurt your chances if you appear too anxious or desperate for this scholarship. You have already successfully negotiated many hurdles in this process. Remember: although you may want this scholarship very badly, it is not

everything. You have many other chances and choices in your life. Recognizing this will help relieve the stress of the interview and may even help you enjoy the process.

If you are not chosen — since these programs are very competitive — it is not the end of the world. You can always apply again, or apply to a different program at another time. The interview experience itself can help train you for the next time, which can only work to your advantage in every subsequent experience.

# General Tips

**There are several guidelines to keep in mind as you proceed through the interview:**

- **Selectors will have their own agenda — things in which they take a particular interest. Listen closely to all the nuances of their questions before your begin to form your answer.**
- **You may have to deal with some very strong, and perhaps even competing egos among the selectors. Try not to please just one and offend another.**
- **Some situations can require tact. In light of the points above you must be aware of the dynamic in the room and be prepared to be both honest and diplomatic if need be.**
- **You may have laypeople on your panel, whose questions about your work you may consider ill-informed, even "dumb." Be patient, respectful, and gear your answer to the questioner.**
- **You may encounter seemingly hostile questions, such as, "What are you doing here?" Maintain your professionalism and answer as honestly as you can.**

### *Tips for Women*

In an ideal world interviews would be gender-neutral, and in many cases they are. While it is natural that interviewers would want to know as much as possible about candidates, both personally and professionally, there are still situations in which women are subjected to completely inappropriate questions — questions that are rarely, if ever, raised when a man is the candidate.

These questions can range from patronizing to absurd, from disrespectful to hostile to downright offensive. In general, no matter what question is thrown at you, your best strategy is to MAINTAIN YOUR PROFESSIONALISM — even if the selectors do not. Most important, know that other women before you have dealt with this situation and gone on to win their scholarships.

Some questions women candidates have faced and for which you should prepare an answer in advance:

- Where does a husband fit into your plan?
- Why are you not interested in getting married?
- How does your husband (or family) feel about this scholarship?
- Your biological clock is ticking, are you aware that this is an ideal time to have children?
- Would you feel terrible about leaving your family for two years?
- Why should we give you a scholarship — you are just going to get married, have children and waste it.

It is helpful to recognize that the answer to some of these questions may be irrelevant, or there may be no "correct" answer at all. The selector, being provocative, may be interested only in your reaction to the question, to see if you will lose your composure.

One of the problems you may face if confronted with questions of this sort is just how offended you might be, and how honestly you want to

respond. On the one hand you want to maintain your composure, and show the panel that you are calm and rational and logical and reasonable. On the other hand, such a question may give you the ideal opportunity to demonstrate to the panel your leadership qualities, your outspokenness and your independence. Whatever response you choose, it should reflect you as honestly and professionally as possible.

To cite the most outrageous question, one woman reported being asked by a male during her scholarship interview, "What would you do if I raped you right now?" Of course, this is a very extreme example and one that is completely inappropriate. If you get asked such an embarrassing and irrelevant question, you might simply respond, "I am not sure how that question relates to my interest in this scholarship program." You can be sure that some of the panelists would be equally shocked and upset by such questions. The point is that you must EXPECT ANYTHING in an interview and BE PREPARED to deal with a wide variety of issues and personalities.

# Terms and Conditions of Your Scholarship

Receiving a scholarship for international education is a significant achievement, and worthy of celebration. The competition is intense, and if you are accepted you have every reason to be very proud. And while it is exciting and an honor to be offered a scholarship, you will now be faced with many other issues.

Be sure you study very carefully the written materials you are sent by the program to ensure that you understand the conditions and restrictions of your award. You may also want to consult existing reference materials to help prepare you for your experience abroad. In general, though, if you have areas of concern, or if you are confused about anything at all do not be afraid to ASK QUESTIONS. Assumptions are very dangerous and if you simply assume that certain things will or will not happen in your host country you may be in for unpleasant surprises. You will not jeopardize your award, nor will anyone think you are overly inquisitive, silly or nervous if you write or call for more information before accepting. This is a big change in your life and a number of people — program and university staff — are there to help you and to ensure that you have a successful experience.

Terms and conditions of the many scholarship programs vary greatly. For some government-administered programs, these parameters (which are often heavily regulated by law) can be quite specific and non-negotiable. Some programs have very thorough guidelines for grantees, others do not. Regardless of the program, there are several broad areas that you may want to think about as you consider your award.

### *Financial Issues*

It is the very rare scholarship that will cover all your expenses for study abroad, including all

travel, living costs, health insurance, etc. In the U.S., for example, higher education is extremely expensive, in some cases approaching $20,000 for tuition, room, board and other living expenses. The financial aid situation is complex and ever-changing.

In general, in addition to your scholarship funds, you must ensure that you have adequate financial resources to cover all of your expenses of studying abroad. Moving to a new country without sufficient funds may well bring on serious problems. A worst-case scenario could include eviction, lawsuits for non-payment of bills, a loss of matriculating status due to non-payment of tuition, and subsequent loss of visa and perhaps even deportation. So, be sure you know exactly what costs are covered by your scholarship, and what you need to supplement with your own funds or funds from other sources. Once you have received a scholarship, it may be possible to get additional money from other sources. Go back to those same information sources mentioned earlier in this booklet, and ask for suggestions.

### *Family Issues*

Most scholarship programs are not geared primarily toward supporting a family to accompany the award-winner. If you know in advance that you must bring family members with you, you should seek out those scholarship programs that make special provisions for the family — they are very uncommon, but they do exist.

In general however, if you plan to bring along a spouse or children during your study abroad, you must take steps to ensure that you have other funds available to cover their expenses. It is almost guaranteed that you will have to cover most of these costs from your own family funds. Program staff may be able to make recommendations, or help you with some red tape, but these costs will ultimately be your responsibility. If you are bringing your spouse or other family members, it would be helpful for you to seek out the advice

of others in a similar situation who have studied overseas and brought their family. Things to consider well in advance:

- Employment opportunities and/or academic opportunities for an accompanying spouse (Be sure to check whether their visa status abroad will permit employment.)
- Necessary documentation for spouse and/or children to get visa approval
- Adequate financial resources to support a household (rather than a single person)
- Availability of schooling and/or daycare for children — and their language capabilities
- Health insurance for family (in addition to your own health insurance)

Occasionally a married couple will apply jointly for scholarships for international study. Again, few programs are set up specifically to accommodate a couple's special needs, and in some cases couples are specifically discouraged. Keep in mind that you need to consider every part of your life — personal, academic, social, professional — and that it is unlikely that any program will necessarily meet your needs in all areas. But, if you speak up and let program staff know of your situation, they may be sensitive to your concerns and be able to help you. There are many variables, and you need to be very clear on your goals — and the compromises you are willing to make — as an individual and as a couple before embarking on such a path.

Although family considerations must be weighed carefully when you are deciding whether or not to accept a scholarship, you alone can set your priorities and make a responsible, realistic choice. It is unfair to other candidates if you send in an acceptance and later have to withdraw for family reasons, particularly if you withdraw late in the process. Of course, emergencies do arise, and unforeseen circumstances may necessitate a change in your plans. But remember that scholarships for international education are highly sought after and many, many people vie for them. If you find that you cannot accept, you should let the appropriate people know as soon as possible so that someone else may benefit.

### Health Insurance

Health insurance varies widely from policy to policy, program to program, university to university, and country to country. It is a very complex situation, and (at least in the U.S.) health insurance issues are hotly debated and the situation is very fluid. Health-related expenses that are covered on one policy may not be covered on others. Prescriptions written in other countries are generally NOT HONORED by pharmacies in the U.S. And pre-existing medical conditions — including pregnancy — are generally NOT COVERED by U.S. health insurance companies. So you need to be prepared to cover such expenses, which can be surprisingly expensive (at least at U.S. hospitals).

Be prepared and be an educated healthcare consumer. Find out specifically about anything that is important to you in terms of your own health care needs. You should bring a copy of your medical records, including dental records and x-rays with you, if you will be abroad for more than a few months and if you have any special medical concerns. Bringing an extra pair of eyeglasses, and a sufficient supply of any regular medication you take may also be advisable. Keep in mind that medical coverage varies widely by country and by culture. Some plans may cover prescription drugs, birth control, pregnancy-related costs, abortion services; some may offer coverage for mental health services; some may emphasize preventive and/or holistic care; some may provide little beyond hospitalization in case of emergencies.

Even though many scholarship programs offer health insurance to grantees, some universities refuse to accept this coverage and require grantees to pay an additional fee to participate in the university's own health care plan. These university plans are often quite inexpensive, and are worth paying for even if you have to do so out of your own funds, especially if they include access to a campus-based medical clinic for you and accompanying family members. If at all possible, get a copy of any health plan in which you will participate, with all of its details, in writing.

Although this is by no means an exhaustive list, what follows are some issues and questions to consider concerning medical insurance:

- Do you have a special medical condition (for example, asthma or diabetes)?
- Do you require regular medications (for example, allergy pills, birth control pills, pain control pills)?
- Are these medications available in the country where you will be going to study? (For example, many drugs available without a prescription in other countries are strictly regulated in the U.S., and may require a U.S. doctor's prescription. Some may not even be available, so you may need to bring an adequate supply with you.)
- Is dental insurance available and how much does it cost?
- Are prescription eyeglasses covered by your insurance? If not, bring an extra pair with you.
- Will your visa application require advance certification that you are free of various communicable diseases?
- What advance immunizations are required (for example, tuberculosis)?
- What, if any, is the "deductible" on the health insurance policy? (The deductible is what you must pay, in cash, before the insurance company will pay for other costs incurred.)
- What is the additional cost for coverage for spouse and/or children? Whatever those costs, you must be sure to include them in your coverage, since many countries (including the U.S.) require health insurance for all family members accompanying a sponsored international student.

### *Culture Shock*

Learning about and adjusting to another way of life can be a wonderful experience, but it can also be frustrating and stressful. While there is no way

to anticipate every possible problem or situation you may encounter, there are strategies for helping you to make the transition to your new home as pleasant as possible.

Timing is very important. As soon as you know that you will be studying abroad, start a checklist of items that need your attention while you are still at home such as bank accounts, investments, credit cards, rent or mortgage payments, insurance policies, and legal matters.

Some international scholarship programs provide very thorough orientation materials, and others do not. Even for those programs that have good written resources, materials may be relatively generic because it is often not possible to produce very detailed information on the many countries where these programs operate.

To facilitate your experience, do your homework. Learn as much as you can about your country of study before you go. The more that you know, the more comfortable you will be. The university you will be attending might be able to provide the names of alumni who you can contact from your home country who are familiar with the university. Contact the alumni association for your program that serves returning grantees. Ask the embassy or consulate of the country for any general literature they might have, and ask to be invited to any lectures or programs they offer before your departure. Attend organized pre-departure events that some programs offer for candidates. Consult travel guides such as *Let's Go USA* (or similar guides for the appropriate country). International student offices at host universities tend to have a lot of information and are helpful, so contact them directly. You may want to correspond with this office prior to your arrival to request any orientation materials they have. Allow sufficient time for these materials to arrive through the international post.

Programs also vary greatly in their ability to provide direct help when you arrive in your adopted country. Some will arrange to meet you at the airport when you arrive from your home country,

while others simply do not have the resources for that kind of personal service. Find out in advance what to expect upon your arrival. You may have to deal with the airport and customs, as well as traveling to your university on your own. It may seem daunting, but you will not have any serious problems so long as you are prepared in advance with the information you need about where to go, and some funds to cover unexpected local travel costs.

Find out, to the extent possible, about the general cultural norms in your new country. Americans, for example, tend to be informal, curious about international visitors, and talkative. Many other societies can be more formal and reserved. While you should never be reticent about asking questions, be sensitive to the prevailing cultural attitudes to avoid any misunderstanding. The worst that can happen is that someone simply will not answer you or will not understand. Persistence is a virtue — and a necessary survival skill. Simply ask someone else and keep asking till you find out what you need to know. Ultimately you will get the information you need. Also familiarize yourself with the civil/political situation in your country of study, e.g., is it normal to see police patrolling the campus? Where is it safe or unsafe for women to walk alone? Where should you turn for help in case of an emergency? What are your rights and responsibilities as a foreign student or scholar, given your specific visa status?

## Tips

**Never assume, always ask.**

**Have local telephone numbers with you — for the scholarship program and university staff.**

**Have sufficient funds in local currency for transportation and emergency lodging.**

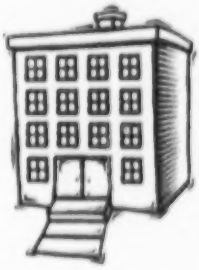
**Be sure that the university and scholarship staff have contact information on where you are if you are traveling away from the host campus — and information on who to contact back in your home country in case of emergency.**

## *Acclimation*

No two people respond to a new environment in the same way. Some adjust quickly, for others it takes more time and effort. Depending upon your personal circumstances, you may be dealing with many different questions and situations such as:

**Housing**

Setting up a household
Where to find inexpensive furnishings (and clothing)
How to find compatible roommates
How to deal with leases and landlords



**Transit**

Negotiating the public transportation systems
Commuting from home to school/job
How to buy a car/bicycle

**Children**

Finding daycare/reliable babysitters
Finding good schools
Meeting other families

**Finances**

Dealing with banks
Availability of emergency funds

Talking with other people — networking — is the most effective way of navigating in a new country. In addition to the international student resources at the university and through your program, you should widen your circle by reaching out to the larger community. There are many organizations that may be able to help you in unexpected ways such as:

- on-campus special-interest student organizations (academic, professional and social)
- religious institutions: churches, synagogues and mosques
- local chambers of commerce/tourist bureaus
- women's groups and community groups such as Rotary or AAUW (American Association of University Women)

- arts/cultural organizations and local libraries
- civic/political organizations
- nonprofit and/or grassroots groups and NGOs
- local media, newspapers, radio and television

Many of these organizations have newsletters, or maintain bulletin boards through which you can learn about useful opportunities: used textbooks, cheap travel tickets, babysitting, cultural events, political rallies, religious services, help with child-care or housekeeping, book discussion groups, where to buy used furniture, clothes, sports equipment. If it is available, also consider using the Internet. Information on a huge variety of topics can be accessed electronically, and one significant advantage of the Internet over print resources is that its information tends to be the most current available. Some program participants are now beginning to use the Internet to communicate directly with other program grantees to share practical information.

Finally, it is important to maintain contact with your home country while you are studying abroad. Staying in touch with local embassy personnel and subscribing to a home country newsletter or an Internet resource are good ways to do this. Be sure to keep in regular contact with your employer or academic colleagues back home, as well as with your family and friends. Not only will this keep you informed on things happening at home, it will widen your network in your adopted country, and will ease your transition back home at the end of your international educational or training experience.

Remember that you are not alone! Tens of thousands of women worldwide have successfully followed the same path you are now setting out on — and have returned home to make important contributions. If you have the talent and desire and dedication to pursue your dreams of overseas study, you can succeed. We wish you well in your endeavor.

For the location of your local Fulbright Commission or U.S. Educational Advising Center, contact the American Embassy or Consulate in your country. For the nearest International Center for Research on Women, contact the National Council for Research on Women, 530 Broadway, New York, New York, 10012.

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The logo depicts eight women dancing. Each has her own energy and dynamism. Each one is tied to the other through a common center. Thus, they all together generate more energy and power than each of them could generate singly. The logo celebrates women as risk-takers, doers, and active shapers of their own destinies.

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